

There was no Zionist ethnic cleansing plan in 1948



Adin Haykin · [Follow](#)

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No, there was no Zionist plan to expel all the Palestinians, it was never the basis of the Zionist vision or official policy during any stage in the Israeli War of Independence.

The Zionist vision: to live together

Was the expulsion an ideological basis of the Zionist movement?

Herzl and “the removal of the poor”

Many anti-Zionist sources, like “The Question of Palestine” by Edward W. Said, use this quote from Theodor Herzl:

“Both the process of expropriation and the removal of the poor must be carried out discreetly and circumspectly,”

In addition to the fact that the quote does not speak at all about the Palestinians or Arabs, here is the full context of this quote:

“When we occupy the land, we shall bring immediate benefits to the state that receives us. We must expropriate gently the private property on the estates assigned to us. We shall try to spirit the penniless population across the border by procuring employment for it in the transit countries, while denying it any employment in our country. **The property owners will come over to our side.** Both the process of expropriation and the removal of the poor must be carried out discretely and circumspectly ... It goes without saying that we shall respectfully tolerate persons of other faiths and protect their property, their honor, and their freedom with the harshest means of coercion. This is another area in which we shall set the entire world a wonderful example ... Should there be many such immovable owners in individual areas [who would not sell their property to us], we shall simply leave them there and develop our commerce in the direction of other areas which belong to us.”



Theodor Herzl "protect their property, their honor, and their freedom"

Here is the actual Herzl's vision in his 1902 book Altneuland:

"Just look at that field! It was a swamp in my boyhood. The New Society bought up this tract rather cheaply, and turned it into the best soil in the country. It belongs to that tidy settlement up there on the hill. It is a Moslem village-you can tell by the mosque. These people are better off than at any time in the past. They support themselves

decently, their children are healthier and are being taught something. Their religion and ancient customs have in no wise been interfered with. They have become more prosperous-that is all.”

Ben-Gurion, expelling the Arabs? “dangerous utopia”

As early as 1915, Ben-Gurion argued that:

“Our goal is not antithetical to the Arab community in the country; we do not intend to marginalize the Arabs, or to displace them from their lands and take their place.

As early as 1918, David Ben-Gurion argued that:

“had Zionism desired to evict the inhabitants of Palestine it would have been a dangerous utopia and a harmful, reactionary mirage.” [1]



David Ben-Gurion "Palestine will belong to the Jewish people and its Arab inhabitants"

In 1926, as secretary-general of the federation of Jewish workers (Histadrut), the foremost Jewish socio-economic organization in mandatory Palestine with responsibility for the Jewish community's (or the Yishuv as it was commonly known) nascent clandestine military arm the Hagana (meaning defence in Hebrew), Ben-Gurion argued that:

"the Arab community in the country is an organic, inextricable part of Palestine; it is embedded in the country, where it labours and where it will stay. It is not to disinherit

this community or to thrive on its destruction that Zionism came into being ... Only a madman can attribute such a desire to the Jewish people in Palestine. Palestine will belong to the Jewish people and its Arab inhabitants” [2]

Jabotinsky: “the Arabs will be happy”

As early as 1905, the Right-wing leader Ze’ev Jabotinsky protested at the mistreatment of Arabs by some Jewish villagers, insisting that:

‘we must treat the Arabs correctly and affably, without any violence or injustice’. [3]

He reiterated this position in ‘The Iron Wall’:

‘I am prepared to take an oath binding ourselves and our descendants that we shall never do anything contrary to the principle of equal rights, and that we shall never try to eject anyone. This seems to me a fairly peaceful credo.’



Ze'ev Jabotinsky "treat the Arabs correctly and affably, without any violence or injustice"

Eleven years later Jabotinsky presided over the drafting of a constitution for Jewish Palestine. According to its provisions, Arabs and Jews were to share both the prerogatives and the duties of statehood including, most notably, military and civil service; Hebrew and Arabic were to enjoy the same legal standing; and: "in every cabinet where the prime minister is a Jew, the vice-premiership shall be offered to an Arab and vice versa".[4]

When asked by the Peel commission whether he still subscribed to the view that 'on a long view the Jewish village cannot prosper unless the Arab village prospers with it', Jabotinsky replied:

“Yes. I think on the whole it is true and I think Palestine, such as I dream of it, should be a country of very happy Arabs. ... When we shall become a majority and make the country rich and develop all its possibilities and utilize all its resources, then it will be a prosperity in which the Arabs will be happy.” [5]

From the founder Herzl to Ben-Gurion and Jabotinsky, the vision was not to expel but to live together.

Peel Commission, A Zionist transfer agreement?

Anti-Zionist writers typically use the protocols of some meetings of the Jewish Agency Executive in June 1938 as proof that “most of Yishuv’s leaders, including Ben-Gurion, wanted to establish a Jewish state without an Arab minority, or with as small an Arab minority as possible. and supported a `transfer solution” (Ilan Pappé quotes Benny Morris in “The Israel / Palestine Question”)

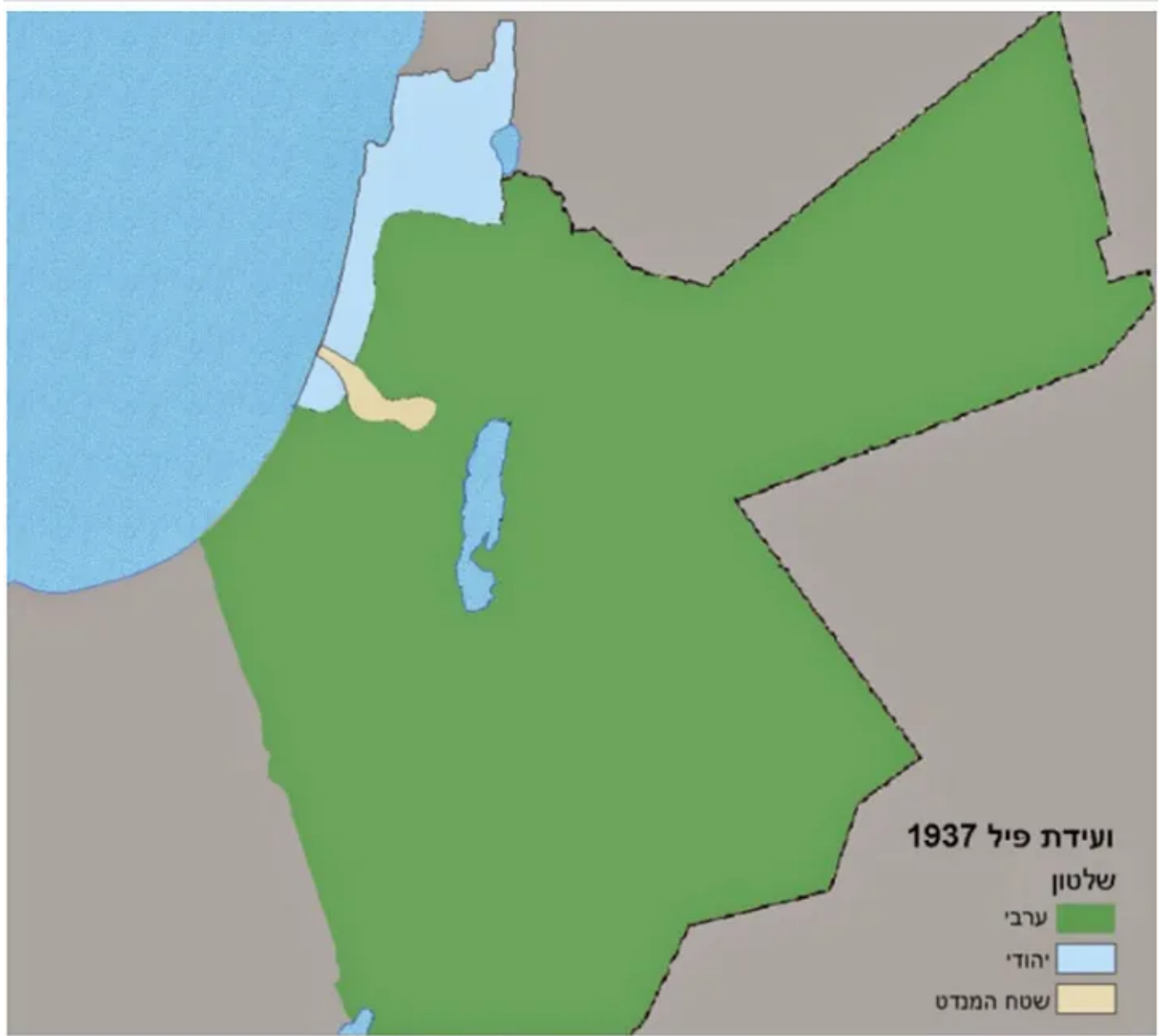
Was the transfer really a Zionist idea?

Did the Zionist leadership really support that idea?

The British proposal

The first time the idea of a Palestine partition, combined with transfer and exchange of population, was put forward by any responsible body, was in the report of the British Royal Commission on Palestine under the chairmanship of Lord Peel, published in July, 1937. The report submitted that the Palestine Mandate, as voted in 1922 by the League of Nations, was unworkable; it presented a carefully elaborated plan for partitioning the country into a sovereign and independent Arab State consisting of Transjordan, united with some 80% of the territory of Western Palestine, and a sovereign and independent Jewish State covering some 20% of Western Palestine, plus an enclave containing the Holy Places of Jerusalem and Bethlehem which would remain under a new Mandate. [6]

In total, with Transjordan, the Arabs were offered 96% of Mandatory Palestine and the Jews only 4%



The proposal of the Peel Commission, a Jewish state in blue, an Arab state in green, a mandate in yellow

In the belief of the Royal Commission, this partition scheme offered the only constructive and permanent solution of the Arab-Jewish conflict over Palestine. The Commission was, however, well aware of the fact that the demarcation line between the two States, which had been drawn with the intention of creating—as far as possible—ethnically uniform territories, had left considerable Arab and Jewish minorities in the proposed states. The Jewish minority in the Arab State was relatively small. According to the figures given by the Royal Commission, there were only some 1,250 Jews. The Arab minority in the proposed Jewish State was, however, incomparably larger. It comprised about 225,000 persons. The Commission insistently emphasized that “the existence of these minorities clearly constitutes the most serious hindrance to the

smooth and successful operation of partition. The ‘minority problem’ has become only too familiar in recent years, whether in Europe or in Asia. It is one of the most troublesome and intractable products of post-war nationalism; and nationalism in Palestine, as we have seen, is at least as intense a force as it is anywhere in the world... If the settlement is to be clean and final, this question of the minorities must be boldly faced and firmly dealt with. It calls for the highest statesmanship on the part of all concerned.”

The Royal Commission suggested that “an instructive precedent” for the solution of this thorny problem was afforded by the exchange of the Greek and Turkish populations after the Greco-Turkish war in 1923. It insistently recommended the acceptance of a similar solution with regard to the Jewish and Arab minorities in the prospective Arab and Jewish States. The Commission expressed the hope that in view of the manifest advantage for both nations of “reducing the opportunities of future friction to the utmost,” the Arab and Jewish leaders “might show the same high statesmanship as that of the Turks and the Greeks and make the same bold decision for the sake of peace.”

As to whether the proposed transfer should be voluntary or compulsory, the Commission took a practical stand. With regard to the hill country of North Galilee with its wholly Arab population, the Commission believed that it might not be necessary to effect a greater exchange of land and population than could be effected on a voluntary basis; but, as regards plains, including Beisan, and Jewish colonies in the prospective Arab State, “it should be part of the agreement that in the last resort the exchange would be compulsory.” [7]

In short, the idea of transfer was forced on the Zionist agenda by the British (in the recommendations of the 1937 Peel Royal Commission on Palestine) rather than being self-generated.

Myths and facts about the Zionist response to the Peel Commission.

The Palestinian information site “Palestine Remembered” stated that “Ben-Gurion emphasized that the acceptance of the Peel Commission would not imply static borders for the future Jewish state”. The article relies on the historian Benny Morris. It should be remembered that Morris was one of the “new historians” and it seems that since then he has changed his views. Yet anti-Zionist elements still quote from his

books, both old and new. The website “Palestine Remembered” quotes from his book an excerpt from Ben-Gurion’s letter in 1938:

“[I am] satisfied with part of the country, but on the basis of the assumption that after we build up a strong force following the establishment of the state — **we will abolish the partition of the country and we will expand to the whole Land of Israel.**”

Here is the full protocol:

Mr. Ben-Gurion: The starting point for a solution of the question of the Arabs in the Jewish State is, in his view, **the need to prepare the ground for an Arab — Jewish agreement**; he supports [the establishment of] the Jewish State [on a small part of Palestine], not because he is satisfied with part of the country, but on the basis of the assumption that after we constitute a large force following the establishment of the state — we will cancel the partition [of the country between Jews and Arabs] and we will expand throughout the Land of Israel.

Mr. Shapira [a JAE member]: By force as well?

Mr. Ben-Gurion: [No]. **Through mutual understanding and Jewish-Arab agreement.** So long as we are weak and few the Arabs have neither the need nor the interest to conclude an alliance with us. So long as it would seem to the Arabs that they can stop our growth and leave us as a small minority — they will try to do so. He does not imagine Arab agreement to mass Jewish immigration — so long as the Jews are weak and few. Only when we become a major power — and the [establishment of a Jewish] state will help this more than anything else — **will the Arabs recognize the need to reach an agreement with us.** And since the state is only a stage in the realization of Zionism and it must prepare the ground for our expansion throughout the whole country through Jewish-Arab agreement — we are obliged to run the state in such a way that will win us the friendship of the Arabs both within and outside the state. Hence the question of the Arabs in the Jewish State is not an ordinary minority question — but one of the fundamental questions of our Zionist policy. The state will of course have to enforce order and security and will do this not only by moralizing and preaching ‘sermons on the mount’ but also by machine guns should the need arise. **But the Arab policy of the Jewish State must be aimed not only at full equality for the**

Arabs but at their cultural, social, and economic equalization, namely, at raising their standard of living to that of the Jews” [8]

All that Ben-Gurion suggested was that the question of the Arabs in the prospective Jewish state should be resolved by peaceful means through an ‘Arab-Jewish agreement

Another quote they use is Ben-Gurion commented on the proposed Peel Commission Partition plan as follows in 1937:

“We must EXPEL ARABS and take their places and, if we have to use force-not to dispossess the Arabs of the Negev and Transjordan, but to guarantee our own right to settle in those places-then we have force at our disposal. “

Here again, is the full protocol:

“And then we will have to use force and will use it without hesitation — though only when we have no other choice. **We do not wish and do not need to expel Arabs and take their place.** All our aspiration is built on the assumption — proven throughout all our activity in the Land [of Israel] — that there is enough room in the country for ourselves and the Arabs. B: But if we have to use force — **not to dispossess the Arabs of the Negev and Transjordan, but to guarantee our own right to settle in those places —** then we have force at our disposal.” [8]

Another quote that anti-Zionists use is by the President of the Zionist Executive Committee Menachem Ussishkin from June 1938 JNF management meeting:

“If you ask me whether it is moral to remove 60,000 families from their places of residence and transfer them elsewhere, while of course providing them with the means for resettlement — I’ll tell you it’s moral.”

Full protocol:

“If you ask me whether it is moral to take 60,000 families from the places in which they presently reside and transfer them to a different location, while giving them of course all the means for resettlement — then I will tell you that it is moral, for if it is possible to rob the Jewish People of nine-tenths of its historic homeland (including Transjordan), to deny them any foothold there and to forbid them to go and settle and purchase [land] there — and this after all the hopes instilled in us and all the

commitments undertaken by the Balfour Declaration and the League of Nations' Mandate etc. etc. If all this is moral, then to give us one small stretch [of land] and to take a part of the Arabs and transfer and settle them in a better-off manner [than that in which they are today] is as moral as can be. I am prepared to stand before the Lord and the League of Nations and defend the morality of the matter. But it is not the question of morality that is at issue here but rather that of practicality; and I say here that we Jews cannot undertake this... this can only be done by the British government if it so wishes" [8]

In other words, Ussishkin viewed the transfer of some Arabs by the British authorities (not by the Zionist movement) as a direct consequence of the Peel Partition Plan — to which he was adamantly opposed in the first place — rather than an ideal to be aspired to; its morality being in his eyes a corollary of the expropriation of 90 per cent of the Land of Israel from its rightful owners. Had the Royal Commission not made this particular proposal, there would have been no need for the 'sweetener' of transfer.

Another distorted quote from Ben-Gurion:

"I support compulsory transfer. I do not see in it anything immoral"

The meeting's protocol reads as follows:

"I saw in the Peel Plan two positive things: the ideas of a state and compulsory transfer... I support compulsory transfer. I don't see in it anything immoral, but compulsory transfer can only be effected by England and not by the Jews... Not only is it inconceivable for us to carry it out, but it is also inconceivable for us to propose it" [8]

So what did the Zionist leadership decide in the following the Peel commission?

The conclusions of the Jewish Agency on 7 June 1938:

- "1. The constitution of the Jewish State will be based on the general voting right of all its adult citizens regardless of their religion, race, sex, or class..."
2. 'The Jewish State will protect the rights of the religious and national minorities and will ensure the freedom of worship and conscience of all communities and citizens'.
3. 'Every religious community will enjoy complete freedom to make its own practising arrangements, without undermining public order and the foundations of morality.'

Holy days of each religious community will be recognized as official resting days of this community’.

4. ‘There will be no discrimination among citizens of the Jewish State on the basis of race, religion, sex, or class’.

5. ‘Hebrew will be the state language. But every national minority will be given full freedom to use its own language in educating its children and in managing the rest of its internal needs’.

6. ‘The Arab minority will be able to use the Arabic language not only in its own educational, religious, and communal institutions, but also in its contacts with all state institutions. In every district, town, or village, where Arabs form a majority, all government announcements will be published in Arabic as well’.

7. ‘The Jewish State will not content itself with full legal equality of all its citizens but will make deliberate graduated efforts to bring the quality of life of the Arab minority to the cultural, social, and economic level of the Jewish majority — through compulsory education to all children, medical and sanitary services, special legislation to protect industrial and agricultural workers, and the cultivation of general trade unionism and market cooperation with no ethnic discrimination among Jewish and Arab workers, peasants, members of the free professions, industrialists, and merchants’.

8. ‘Until the barriers between the standards of living of the Jewish majority and the Arab minority will have been blurred — the state will ensure a fair percentage of its working places and services to Arab civil servants and workers at equal salaries to Jewish civil servants and workers. In addition, Arab representatives will be ensured a fair percentage in the state’s elected institutions, without institutionalizing sectarian elections’.

9. ‘In tandem with its effective protection of minority rights in all economic, political, and cultural walks of life — the state will endeavour to root among all its citizens a mutual awareness of their being members of the same state and will cultivate any action and organization aimed at destroying barriers between ethnic groups and religions in all official spheres.”

Hence the Woodhead Commission's above-noted comment that "on behalf of the Jews it was made clear to us that Jewish opinion was opposed to the exercise of any degree of compulsion"

Myths about the Zionist response to the 1947 Partition Plan

According to the same website "Palestine Remembered", this was the Zionist response to the partition

"Ben-Gurion was happy and sad when the U.N. voted to partition Palestine into two states, Palestinian and Jewish. He was happy because "finally" Jews could have a "country" of their own. On the other hand, he was sad because they have "lost" almost half of Palestine, and because they would have to contend with a sizable Palestinian minority, well over 45% of the total population. In the following few quotes, you will see how he also stated that a "Jewish state" cannot survive being 60% Jewish; implying that something ought to be done to remedy the so called "Arab demographic problem"

The quote from Ben-Gurion that they use:

"In the area allocated to the Jewish State there are not more than 520,000 Jews and about 350,000 non-Jews, mostly Arabs. Together with the Jews of Jerusalem, the total population of the Jewish State at the time of its establishment, will be about one million, including almost 40% non-Jews. such a [population] composition does not provide a stable basis for a Jewish State. This [demographic] fact must be viewed in all its clarity and acuteness. With such a [population] composition , there can not even be absolute certainty that control will remain in the hands of the Jewish majority There can be no stable and strong Jewish state as long as it has a Jewish majority of only 60%."

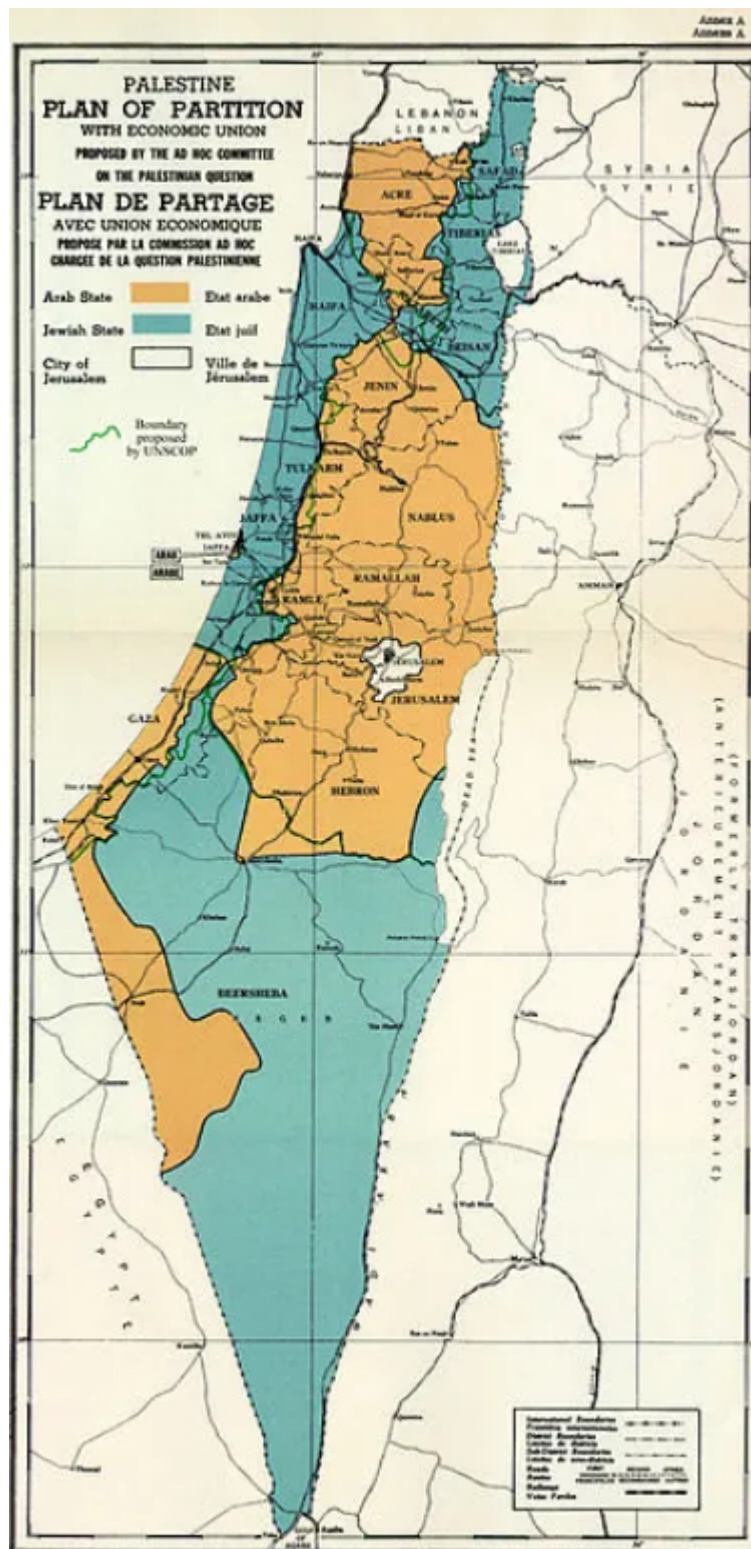
But is this mind-reading of Ben-Gurion correct? Was there really a hint of the transfer idea in the speech? A quick glance at the text from which Morris took his citation will start disentangling the riddle:

"In the territory allotted to the Jewish State there are now above 520,000 Jews (apart from the Jerusalem Jews who will also be citizens of the state) and about 350,000 non-Jews, almost all of whom are Arabs. Including the Jerusalem Jews, the state would have at birth a population of about one million, nearly 40 per cent of which would be non-Jews. This [population] composition does not constitute a solid basis for a Jewish State;

and this fact must be viewed in all its clarity and sharpness. In such composition there cannot even be complete certainty that the government will be held by a Jewish majority... There can be no stable and strong Jewish state so long as she has a Jewish majority of only 60 per cent, and so long as this majority consists of only 600,000 Jews...

We have been confronted with a new destiny — we are about to become masters of our own fate. This requires a new approach to all our questions of life. We must reexamine all our habits of mind, all our systems of operation to see to what extent they suit our new future. We must think in terms of a state, in terms of independence, in terms of full responsibility for ourselves — and for others” [9]

The original text makes clear the alternative solution to this problem: aliya [or Jewish immigration].



Plan Dalet, an ethnic cleansing master plan?

Scholars like Sharif Kan'ana, Ilan Pappé, Rashid Khalidi, Baruch Kimmerling and Walid Khalidi have asserted that Plan D's main goal was the expulsion of the Palestinians from Palestine.

These allegations rely on a single paragraph of Plan D's 75 pages and refer to one of the Plan's many aspects while taking this paragraph out of its context and ignoring or blurring the Plan's real task: defending the forthcoming Jewish state from outside invasion being assisted by domestic Arab subversion. What was the real Plan D, as distinct from the Palestinian-invented one?

In mid-March 1948, the Haganah's planning section of the general staff completed an overall scheme for the termination of the mandate, known as Plan D (its predecessor, Plan C had been drawn up in 1946 against internal riots by local Arabs and was only partially launched in February 1948). The enemy anticipated by the planners consisted of Palestinian combatants and the ALA. Apart from the possible intervention of Arab Legion units that were part of the British garrison in the country, invasion by the other regular Arab armies was not taken seriously as a feasible contingency until early in May 1948. Although it provided for counter-attacks, Plan D was a defensive scheme and its goals were:

- (1) protecting the borders of the upcoming Jewish state according to the partition line;
- (2) securing its territorial continuity in the face of invasion attempts;
- (3) safeguarding freedom of movement on the roads and
- (4) enabling continuation of essential daily routines.

Planning at the general staff level was limited to general schematic guidelines.

Preoccupied in combat, most brigade headquarters had no time for completing the planning or delving into the details. Plan D was not "ideological" as the Palestinians portray, nor was it a "doctrine" as Kimmerling asserts. It was a practical response to an emerging threat. However, it was not even an operational blueprint, as most Israeli works on the war since the publication of the History of the Haganah have described it. Its planners — Israel Ber and Moshe Pasternak under the guidance and supervision of Yigael Yadin — formulated principles and procedures of action and allocated missions and objectives to the Haganah brigades. They did not enter into the tactics for achieving the objectives.

Plan D listed routes, bridges, government buildings and police fortresses that Haganah brigades should have seized immediately upon their evacuation by the British. These were essential for executing the defensive phases of Plan D. However, apart from villages on the main roads and railways, the planners left decisions regarding the fate

of Arab villages, which should be “seized, mopped up or destroyed,” for the brigade’s consideration and did not dictate a general policy.

Occupation of villages was necessary to deny the invading enemy the use of main roads and potential bases for attacking neighbouring Jewish settlements. Instructions called for demolition of villages that could not be held permanently. Another paragraph detailed the method for taking over an Arab village:

“Surround the village and search it [for weapons]. In case of resistance — annihilate the armed force and expel the population beyond the border... If there is no resistance, a garrison should be stationed in the village...The garrison commander should expropriate all weapons, radio receivers and vehicles. All political suspects should be arrested. After consulting the appropriate political authorities, appoint local institutions for administering the village internal affairs.”

The text clarified unequivocally that expulsion concerned only those villages that would fight against the Haganah and resist occupation, and not all Arab hamlets. Similar guidelines related to the occupation of Arab neighbourhoods in mixed towns. [10]

The Transfer Committee, the committee that did not exist

The Transfer Committee was allegedly set up, by non-Cabinet members of the first government of Israel in May 1948, with the aim of overseeing the expulsion of Palestinian Arabs from their towns and villages, and preventing their return.

As Morris puts it:

“Indeed, according to Weitz, Ben-Gurion had not only approved the “whole policy,” but had thought that the proposed actions in Israel (destruction of villages, prevention of harvesting, settlement of Jews in abandoned sites) should take precedence over efforts to resettle refugees elsewhere (meaning negotiating with Arab countries about resettlement, assessing compensation and so forth)”

Morris goes on to characterize these as “**the Transfer Committee’s proposals**” and to indicate that Ben-Gurion approved of them. But did Weitz really tell Ben-Gurion that the “**committee had already begun**” destroying villages? Did Ben-Gurion authorize “**the Transfer Committee’s proposals**”? Not at all, as Weitz himself explains:

“I said that I [and not the “Transfer Committee” as misquoted by Morris] had already given instructions to start here and there “improving” villages — and he approved it. I contented myself with this.”

Weitz’s resort to the first person is important: as director of the Jewish National Fund’s Land Development Division he was directly involved in the question of abandoned Palestinian villages. Moreover, the “**Transfer Committee**” Morris writes of never came into being. During this same meeting, Ben-Gurion specifically told Weitz that he rejected outright the very existence of such a committee. As Weitz put it: “He would like to convene a narrow meeting and to appoint a committee to handle the issue. He does not agree to the [existence] of our temporary committee.”

Having withheld these critical facts, Morris then charge Ben-Gurion with taking great care “**to avoid leaving footprints of his own involvement**” in the activities of the Transfer Committee. To substantiate this false claim, Morris rewrites the entry in Ben-Gurion’s diary pertaining to the meeting. The actual text reads as follows:

“He [i.e., Weitz] proposes to discuss with the Arab Governments help in settling these Arabs in the Arab states. This is [far too] premature and untimely.”

Ben-Gurion did not accept Weitz’s suggestions about settling the Arabs abroad. Rather, Ben-Gurion deemed the latter issue irrelevant and unwarranted because the war was far from over and he had not yet made up his mind about the solution to the refugee problem. [11]

CONCLUSION

According to all available evidence, the Zionist leadership never had a plan for ethnic cleansing or forceful transfer of Arabs from Palestine, neither by the founders of Zionism, neither during the Peel Commission in 1937 and nor during the 1948 war.

[1] “Zechuyot Ha’Yehudim Ve’Zulatam B’Eretz Yisrael,” reprinted in Anachnu U’Shcheneinu, p. 31.

[2] Ben-Gurion, “The Rights of the Jews and the Non-Jews in Palestine” (1918), in his Anahnu Ushkheneinu, pp. 31–32; Ben-Gurion, “The Hebrew Worker and the Arab Worker” (1926), *ibid.*, p. 105.

[3] Ze'ev Jabotinsky, 'What is to be Done?' (1905), in his *Ktavim Zioniim Rishonim* (Jerusalem: Eri Jabotinsky, 1949): 209–10

[4] Jabotinsky, *The Jewish War Front*: 216–20.

[5] Jabotinsky, *The Jewish War Front*, pp. 216–20; Palestine Royal Commission, "Notes of Evidence," p. 379.

[6] "the one an Arab State consisting of Trans-Jordan united with that part of Palestine..."

[7] Population Transfers in Asia, Joseph B. Schechtman, Hallsby Press, NY 1949, Chapter 3.

[8] "Falsifying the Record: Benny Morris, David Ben-Gurion and the 'Transfer' Idea," Israel Affairs, V4, №2, Winter 1997,

[9] David Ben-Gurion, *Yoman Ha-milhama* [War Diary], Tel-Aviv, 1982, Vol.1, p.22

[10] Palestine 1948 by Gelber Yoav, Appendix I History and Invention: Was Plan D a Blueprint for "Ethnic Cleansing?"

[11] Benny Morris and the Reign of Error by Efraim Karsh

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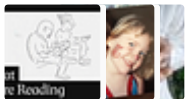
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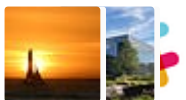


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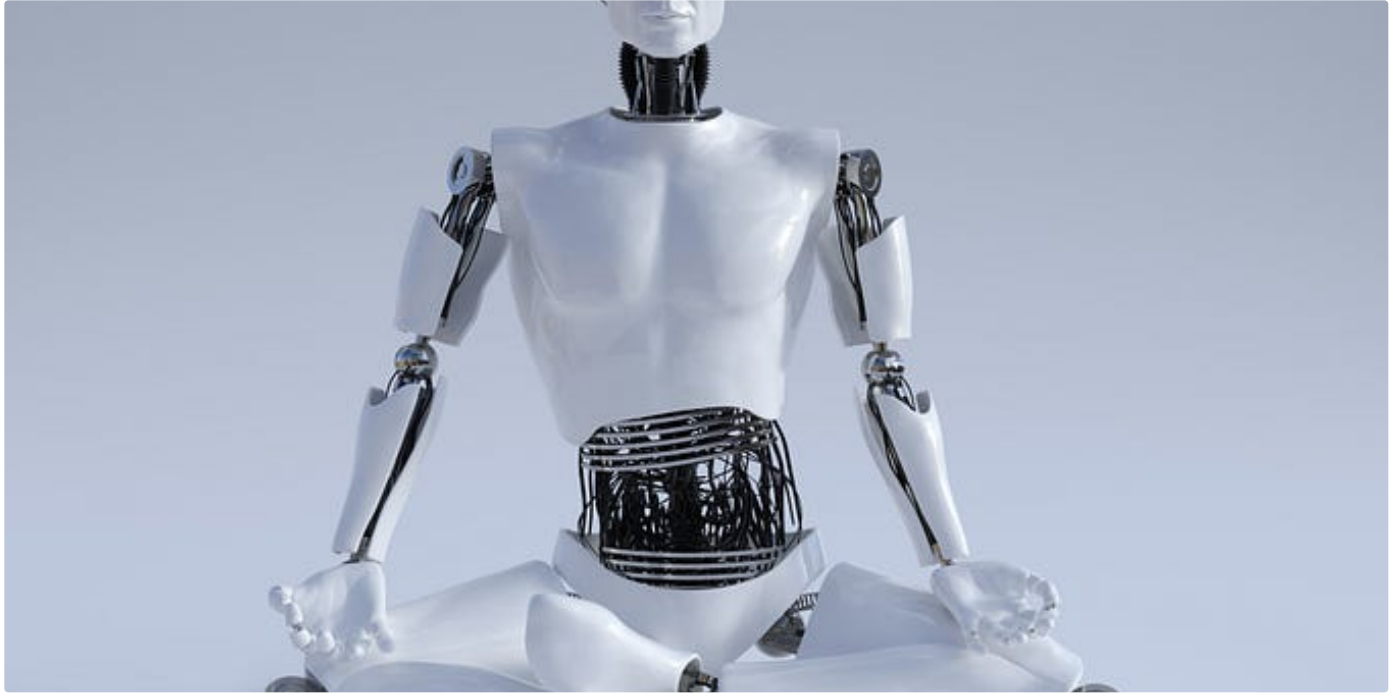
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